

REDMOND PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

July 23, 2003

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chairperson Snodgrass, Commissioners Allen, Bluechel, Dunn, McCarthy, Petitpas

STAFF PRESENT: Lori Peckol, Redmond Planning Department

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Snodgrass in the Public Safety Building Council Chambers.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda as printed was approved by acclamation.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

A. July 16, 2003

Referring to the minutes, Commissioner Bluechel clarified his attendance during discussions of the 116th Street Impact Fee Overlay Amendment and why he had not voted on the Planning Commission's Report. The minutes as amended were approved by acclamation.

ITEMS FROM THE AUDIENCE – None

PUBLIC HEARING AND STUDY SESSION

Updates to Vision, Goals and Framework Policy Element

Public Hearing

Chair Snodgrass declared the public hearing open and announced that after taking testimony the public hearing would be continued to August 13 to provide an opportunity for comment on proposed updates to the vision and transportation framework policies.

Lori Peckol, principal planner, noted that as the Commission has worked to develop updates to the Comprehensive Plan there have been a number of opportunities for public involvement and comment, including workshops, meetings among members of the business community, and Commission meetings. She said the public hearing is focused on the first phase of the Comprehensive Plan update, which will define the basis and direction for other Comprehensive Plan elements.

Ms. Peckol said the proposed updates reflect the preliminary preferred growth strategy as it has been developed with input from the Planning Commission, City Council, citizens and the business community. The Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 1995 and revisions are necessary to reflect current conditions, issues, opportunities and values. The proposed changes include revisions to language and organization of the information to provide clarity and reduce redundancies.

The Planning Commission has two more study sessions scheduled on the framework policies, goals and vision. On August 13, the public hearing will continue to take input regarding the transportation framework policies and vision statement. The Commission is slated to complete its recommendation to the City Council at the August 13 meeting; the Council will take action on the first phase of the amendments in September.

Ms. Marcelle Pechler, 16210 NE 80th Street, spoke as President and CEO of the Greater Redmond Chamber of Commerce. She called attention to the goal of providing a business climate that retains and attracts locally owned companies and maintains a strong and diverse economy. She shared with the Commission the absolute necessity for any community to maintain both large and small businesses; a strong, vibrant economically healthy community cannot exist without both. A small business owner recently raised awareness of the fact that rental rates for retail space in Redmond remain extremely high and are continuing to increase; the same is not happening in either Bellevue or Belltown. In part that is happening because small businesses want to be in the same town as Microsoft and Nintendo. A film crew recently visited Redmond on behalf of a high-tech company interested in locating a corporate headquarters in New Jersey where the governor has expressed no interest whatsoever. The film crew wanted to know what the benefits are to having a corporate headquarters in Redmond; the answer given in part was focused on the synergy between small businesses and large businesses.

Ms. Judy Jewell, 12120 - 202nd Avenue NE, said her business, Olympian Pre-Cast, has been a successful and environmentally responsible manufacturing firm in Redmond for the past 16 years. Uncertainty about the future of manufacturing-zoned land in Redmond makes it difficult to plan for the future of the business. The company's products are seeing increasing use due to their sustainable and creative qualities. A change to the Land Use Section, Page 3, should be considered where the fourth bullet currently reads "Retains and encourages research and development and high-tech uses in Overlake, Willows and Southeast Redmond." The fifth bullet reads "Preserves and encourages manufacturing and industrial uses in suitable areas." It does not call out specifically where such uses should be permitted, as the fourth bullet does. Industrial zoning is only allowed in Southeast Redmond, so the language of the bullet should be revised to read "...industrial uses in suitable areas, specifically Southeast Redmond." The previous Policy 5 calls for protecting the ecological functions of area ecosystems and enhancing the quality of the natural environment by protecting and restoring important critical areas such as streams, wetlands and aquifer recharge areas, and by retaining and protecting significant trees and other natural resources. That language should be examined in the context of the shoreline management program discussions. The state has introduced new guiding principles based on months of work with the business community and environmental groups which recognizes that where there are existing commercial and industrial uses the appropriate language is "no net loss of ecological function." A framework policy promoting enhancement and restoration would

likely be applied to existing commercial and industrial properties. Owners of the industrial area to the south of Union Hill Road are concerned about encroaching housing uses; to the north of the road the industrial sector is seeing the business park zoning pushing eastward. Less than one percent of the land in Redmond carries a high industry overlay to the manufacturing park designation, and it needs to be protected. Such uses serve the local economy, and it would make no sense to force such uses out.

Chair Snodgrass asked if existing industrial property owners could realize a benefit from a change in zoning because property values would rise accordingly. He added that a rezone of the area would not force existing business to relocate. Ms. Jewell did not agree. She said her business employs local residents and offers good wages and benefits. There are a number of reasons for staying in business. If the area were to be rezoned, it is possible that some of the industrial uses would choose to sell out for redevelopment, leaving a few industrial uses left as islands and less viable overall.

Mr. Bill Sayer, Vice President of Cadman, 7554 - 185th Avenue NE, Redmond, said the company owns and operates on about 110 acres located both to the north and south of Union Hill Road. The business has been operating there for more than 60 years and provides over 50 family wage jobs. The company intends to retain its core operations in Redmond, which includes concrete production and the distribution of sand and gravel and concrete aggregates. In 1995, Cadman entered into a concomitant agreement with Redmond for operations. The company does hold some surplus land and is working to define how best to develop that land; the goal will be to develop in a fashion that will not impact the core businesses. There should be in the framework policies specific references to Southeast Redmond as an industrially zoned area.

Chair Snodgrass asked how a change in zoning of the industrial area would negatively affect the business of Cadman. Mr. Sayer echoed the comments of Ms. Jewell. He said industrial uses are generally compatible with each other and operate with a certain degree of synergy. Any change in zoning will have an impact on the existing businesses.

Commissioner Petitpas asked how the surplus properties might be developed. Mr. Sayer said the underlying zoning is R-12 on some of the Cadman-owned property, and business park zoning on other property.

Mr. Peter Schroeder, Secretary/Treasurer of Watson Asphalt, 19220 NE 80th Street, said the company has been operating on the same site since 1967. He noted that the industrially zoned area of Redmond represents a very small percentage of the City as a whole. The production of asphalt on the site involves combining virgin aggregates and oil products with reclaimed asphalt. The recycling portion of the business is integral to all operations and is an environmentally-friendly practice. The use requires quite a large amount of property. He agreed that there is a synergy between industrial uses; the businesses do quite a lot of business with each other. Within the last ten years Watson Asphalt has saved the City of Redmond close to one million dollars through its recycling efforts. The current 49 full-time employees earn an average of \$57,000 per year in addition to benefits. The current industrial zoning allows the existing businesses a degree of certainty. Residential uses are not compatible with industrial uses. Language should be adopted which recognizes the value of industrial uses.

Commissioner Bluechel commented that under the Growth Management Act the City must accept a certain amount of growth. That is one reason why a rezone of the industrial area has been considered. He asked what other areas might be appropriate for additional housing development. Mr. Schroeder offered no suggestions but asked where the industrial uses will locate if forced out of their current locations.

Commissioner Allen asked Mr. Schroeder if he had any ballpark estimates regarding how far residential uses should be kept from industrial areas. He said much depends on the specific industrial use; some uses are noisy, others are dusty, but in general there should be a buffer of at least 500 feet.

Mr. Dennis Craig, Vice President, Dennis R. Craig Construction, 7710 - 185th Avenue NE, said the family-owned business has been located in the same place for 20 years. As a road contractor, the business deals daily with Cadman and Watson Asphalt as well as other industrial companies in Southeast Redmond. If the zoning of the area is changed, over time businesses will move out and their properties redeveloped, leaving little or no buffer between the new uses and the existing uses. If the new uses are residential developments, the industrial businesses will see higher rates of theft, experience greater liability, and will not be popular because of hours of operation. In time even the grandfathered uses would be forced out. The City benefits from having industrial uses and should move to protect them.

Ms. Nancy Bainbridge-Rogers, Cairncross and Hempleman, 524 2nd Avenue, Suite 500, Seattle, spoke on behalf of Microsoft Corporation. She said the goals and framework policies are an important description of the City's intent for the future of Redmond. The corporate headquarters of Microsoft and a large number of the company's employees are located in Redmond, and Microsoft intends to remain part of the community and wishes to be able to continue expanding. Given the intent of the City to provide a suitable business environment, certain revisions should be made to the proposed goals and framework policies. First, the goal statement should more affirmatively recognize the City's goal to retain and allow expansion of corporate headquarters facilities. The current Comprehensive Plan includes a broad and affirmative goal to promote vital commercial and industrial neighborhoods, and a strong diverse economy. The proposed goals do not include the same statement except as to locally owned companies. The proposed goal that reads "To provide a business climate that retains and attracts locally owned companies and maintains a strong and diverse economy" should be revised to read "To provide a business climate that retains and attracts locally owned companies, retains and allows expansion of corporate headquarters and large businesses already located in Redmond, and maintains a strong and diverse economy." The existing Comprehensive Plan goal to improve mobility for people and goods should be retained. Land use and transportation facilities are integrally connected and are critical to ensuring continued vibrancy. The framework policies should also be revised to clearly reflect that any housing planned for the Overlake area should be directed at the retail and commercial areas, not the office areas. Adding a housing component to the Microsoft corporate office development will not be feasible. Policy FW-14 should be revised from "Focuses and promotes office, housing and retail development in the Downtown and in Overlake" to "Focuses and promotes office, housing and retail development in the Downtown, and focuses and

promotes office, housing and retail development in the southern portion of Overlake, and office and ancillary retail in the northern portion of Overlake.”

Mr. Robert Fitzmaurice, 17215 NE 98th Court, said it would be difficult to argue with any of the framework policies in concept. He pointed out, however, that the policies must be looked at as the framework from which will flow regulations. In adopting policy there must be a focus on making sure it is measurable to show accomplishments over time. There must be an understanding of who the policies will affect and assurance that the few will not be asked to shoulder the burden for the many. Thought must also be given to how policies may be interpreted in the future, resulting in unintended consequences. It is not clear how policies that compete with each other should be resolved. A policy such as FW-26 which calls for growth to pay for growth could be at odds with a policy such as FW-11 which calls for maintenance of a strong economy and tax base, or FW-14 which preserves and encourages high-wage jobs. In accord with FW-13, it may be difficult to assure that land use patterns fit with existing uses while safeguarding the environment if such safeguards will entail the establishment of setbacks and buffers that will inherently affect the ability to maintain the existing use. Property owners may not think they are being treated fairly when under FW-2 they are only allowed some economic use of their properties. Policies FW-8 and FW-9 call for provision of a diversity of housing types and supply, yet the City is not in the development business and as such is not able to accomplish the goal. Encouraging development is a different issue and is focused primarily on economics. If the City feels housing policies are important, the members of the community should determine what they are worth and what they are willing to do.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Dunn, Mr. Fitzmaurice allowed that prioritization of competing interests should be done by looking broadly at the full range of issues facing the City. Before rezoning an area it should be known how other policies or the environment will be affected. Tradeoffs are inevitable, but no decision should be made until the tradeoffs and their impacts are clear.

The public hearing was continued to August 13.

Study Session

- Transportation Framework Policy Evaluation and Discussion

Ms. Peckol introduced Jim Charlier of Charlier Associates, specialists in planning and designing multimodal transportation systems. She noted that the work to update the transportation policies will focus on transportation issues and opportunities facing the City, community values that may be missing from the current policies, significant inconsistencies between current conditions and values, and whether or not the guidance is adequate for implementation.

Mr. Charlier said his role as a consultant will be to develop the capability of the City to deal with transportation issues. The process will require a lot of community input and education. In the end the City will have a multimodal transportation plan, something it has not had before.

Referring to his memo previously submitted to the Commissioners, Mr. Charlier explained that the 13 identified policy themes were drawn from a number of sources and are not intended to be the embodiment of everything to be included in the Comprehensive Plan about transportation; rather they are intended to be the principal areas of change. The highlighted policy themes were: 1) maintaining character while absorbing growth; 2) regional strategies, regional connections; 3) through traffic; 4) active living by design; 5) neighborhood traffic protection; 6) gridded, connected street networks; 7) community based transit; 8) multimodal streets; 9) land use interface; 10) real mobility choices; 11) motor freight access and circulation; 12) continued progress on downtown improvements; and 13) strategic investments in roadway capacity.

Commissioner Dunn noted that policy FTR-4 calls for a transportation planning, funding and implementation framework that distributes costs and benefits equitably and assures adequate provision of needed infrastructure. She said that echoes what many in the community are saying, that progress needs to be made while at the same time there must be assurances that it can be paid for. Mr. Charlier said he could create a theme from that direction.

Chair Snodgrass observed that the existing policies are essentially driven by levels of service (LOS). He asked if the current levels of service are something that should be specifically discussed. Ms. Charlier allowed that there are some pitfalls associated with an LOS-based approach. It would be appropriate for the Commission to investigate that arena. For instance, it could be said that achieving LOS is not just about capacity but also about achieving quality of life and other considerations. There are steeply diminishing returns for investments in roadway capacity; such investments are quickly consumed by induced traffic. There is a move away from the traditional focus on building transportation capacity.

There was agreement to focus first on issues 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 and 9.

****BREAK****

Mr. Charlier said there are some key phrases that show up often when describing the character of Redmond: green city, small-town feel, connected place, and diverse place. He said Redmond is indeed a remarkable place; there are very few places where one cannot look up and see a wall of green. However, aerial photos of the downtown show hardscape rapidly replacing the green. The potential policy directions include avoiding wide streets with massive intersections; managing vehicle speeds; implementing green streets; and developing a complete sidewalk/crosswalk network in the commercial areas, especially the downtown.

Commissioner Petitpas suggested that the scale and bulk of buildings, the look and feel of a small town, and green areas all speak to reasons why people choose to live in Redmond.

Commissioner Bluechel observed that generally speaking the residents of Redmond are happy with the way the City is being developed. At Redmond Design Days there was general agreement for the need to maintain the existing character while absorbing additional growth. Some of the streets that access the downtown area could already be termed green streets and nothing should be done to change them.

Commissioner Dunn commented that the natural environment is the one thing that cannot be returned once it is paved over. As decisions are made to take away from the natural environment, they should be made very cautiously and incrementally in order to preserve the fundamental character of Redmond.

Commissioner Allen said the green aspects of Redmond are what brought her to the City to become a resident. The existing Comprehensive Plan with regard to transportation is focused on vehicle capacity and movement. A shift away from that focus toward maintaining the green spaces should be considered. In order to have a strong, pedestrian-friendly environment, traffic must be slowed down. At the same time, if traffic does not flow adequately, backups occur which benefit no one. Those two issues must be balanced in the policies.

Commissioner McCarthy agreed. He stressed the importance of crafting policy which will allow the City to provide the necessary infrastructure while not detracting from the natural beauty of the area.

Chair Snodgrass said preserving the character of Redmond will be the most important policy base; it will set the tone for everything else. When asked what they most like about Redmond, most mention the small-town feel. When asked what they most dislike about the City, the primary answer is traffic. That conflict will continue to be a dilemma. In Arizona the streets are wide and traffic moves smoothly, but it is impossible to tell when moving from one City into another because they all present the same face, which is not warm and inviting. He said given a choice between free-flowing traffic and an inviting downtown, he would choose the latter.

Commissioner Dunn pointed out that there is also a conflict between the City's requirements for parking and the desire to have less paved areas. Mr. Charlier said some communities have directly tackled the issue of limiting impervious surfaces. At least one city imposes a property transportation tax based on the level of impervious surface.

Mr. Charlier suggested that it is not always necessary to build high-speed streets in order to achieve capacity goals. By and large the capacity of a system is driven by signal timing at signalized intersections. Whatever green time is allocated to one movement must be subtracted from another. Good design can make a huge difference.

The Commissioners were shown pictures of what could be considered to be green streets. Mr. Charlier commented that often one's perception of green streets is the view through the windshield; if there are trees fronting the street, the perception is that the street is green. Where sidewalks are pinned to the curb without a buffer the notion of green is not present, whereas if there is a buffer between the sidewalk and the curb the perception is completely opposite. Allowing room for bicycles increases the buffer between pedestrians and cars. In most instances it could also be said that green streets are streets where traffic moves slowly, have on-street parking and are not too wide. Part of the answer might lie in progressive design.

Commissioner Dunn stressed the fact that the notion of green streets goes beyond mere design to include consideration of such things as preservation of views and wildlife habitat.

Chair Snodgrass suggested that the notion of green streets should be defined and adopted as the policy of Redmond, overarching all aspects of design.

With regard to the topic of through traffic, Mr. Charlier allowed that there is no set definition of what the term means. Adopting a definition would be beneficial to all policy choices. As the term is used, it could be applied to those who work in Redmond but live outside the City, or those who live in Redmond but work outside the City.

Some would claim that pass-through traffic should be moved off the core streets onto parallel routes. Others would call for preserving the business that is derived from pass-through traffic. Improving business accessibility and circulation in the downtown is important, and bypass routes may not in fact be economically beneficial. Mr. Charlier recommended that more work needs to be done in defining pass-through traffic before any steps are taken to develop pass-through policies.

Commissioner Dunn said her definition of pass-through traffic would be traffic that does not actually need to be in the City. It could be the result of having a commuter bus station located in the downtown so that people must drive into the area in order to commute out of the area. It could also be the result of a failed freeway and arterial systems that cause drivers to seek alternate routes around the congestion. Solving those problems will help traffic flow.

Commissioner Allen commented that should the decision be made to keep traffic out of the downtown regardless of its destination, small businesses will experience a loss of revenue. There are numerous examples around the country where cities have created bypass routes to keep traffic flowing around the downtown areas with the result that businesses within the downtown areas withered.

Commissioner McCarthy held that the definition of pass-through traffic will differ from person to person, and may vary depending on time of day. Regardless, through-traffic will not be solved without addressing regional issues and understanding what traffic belongs to Redmond and what traffic belongs to the region. It would be helpful to have some information regarding how much local businesses gain from pass-through traffic and to what degree business lost from reducing pass-through traffic could be made up from destination traffic once the perception is that the traffic picture has improved.

Commissioner Bluechel said much of the pass-through issue has to do with connections. He said he does not hesitate to drive to a downtown business during peak hours, but avoids Redmond Way near Bear Creek during peak hours. Much of that has to do with access issues.

Commissioner Petitpas agreed that planning the City's transportation system will need to be tied with planning for the regional system. She added that to a large extent the layout of the transportation system is dictated by the geography of the area; there is not much room for expansion.

Chair Snodgrass suggested that the downtown area likely does not experience much cut-through traffic; the traffic grid there offers no advantages for commuters who are truly only passing

through. Most who are coming from the east to employment centers in Overlake, Bellevue and Seattle choose to use SR-520. There is far more of a problem for commuters traveling south from Woodinville, however.

Commissioner Dunn observed that because the flow of traffic on Avondale and the connection to SR-520 are undesirable, many choose to cut through the downtown area specifically to avoid SR-520.

Commissioner Bluechel said given a choice between reducing cut-through traffic and preserving natural areas and the character of Redmond, his choice would be to leave the cut-through traffic alone.

Mr. Charlier observed that the pass-through issue should be considered on a scale that is much broader than just the downtown. From a business perspective, pass-through traffic is more or less of an issue depending on the type of business; restaurants, for example, often feel they gain from pass-through traffic. The real issues could be access and circulation.

Turning to the topic of active living by design, Mr. Charlier said there is a current trend toward personal health as affected by community choices. It is clear that when people talk about quality of life at the neighborhood level they include the notion of being able to walk places.

Commissioner Bluechel suggested that the topic is integral to other issues and as such should not be made to stand on its own.

Commissioner Allen held that the issue is related to preserving the character of Redmond. As such it could serve as a subset of that issue. Walkability is a large issue already but will become even more important as the population ages.

Mr. Charlier explained that the goals and policies established by the City weigh heavily in favor of additional capacity when a conflict arises between providing a sidewalk or capacity. The data, however, clearly supports the need for active living as a public health concern. With a policy in favor of active living the City would be in a position to make better choices. He agreed that the issue could be combined with another category and still be adequately addressed.

Commissioner Dunn noted that many do not walk because they make the choice not to use sidewalks and the like even where they do exist. The policy of the City should be to promote active living.

Commissioner Allen said she would like to see active living become a framework policy.

Chair Snodgrass allowed that building sidewalks and bicycle facilities will not guarantee improved health on the part of the residents because they cannot be forced to use them. On the other hand, unless such facilities are constructed the residents will not even have the opportunity to better their lifestyles.

Commissioner Bluechel stressed the need to focus on filling in gaps where they exist.

Ms. Peckol indicated that the Commission will be asked to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

It was moved and seconded to nominate Commissioner Dunn to serve as Vice Chair. There were no other nominations offered and Commissioner Dunn was unanimously elected Vice Chair.

REPORTS – None

SCHEDULING/TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING

Ms. Peckol said the upcoming meeting will focus on the transportation policies and completing review of the other framework policies and goals.

ADDITIONS TO ACTION LIST – None

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Snodgrass adjourned the meeting at 9:40 p.m.

Minutes Approved On:

Recording Secretary:
